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ABSTRACT

The problem of determining the grammatical status of predicate words in Russian is examined in this article. The contrast between the morphological heterogeneity and the seemingly uniform function of predicative forms has led to the postulation of a new part of speech described as the "category of state". However, the status of predicate words as a whole suggests to the author that their function is more akin to that of identifiable, existing parts of speech and that the introduction of a special "category of state" may be superfluous. (RL)

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A NOTE ON «PREDICATIVE WORDS» IN RUSSIAN

The phenomenon of the impersonal predicate is not confined to the Russian language, but it occupies a unique place in Russian syntax thanks to the defective character of the present tense of *byt'*. The problem of determining the grammatical status of the «predicative words» which feature in this non-verbal construction has exercised grammarians for many years. To some [1] it has seemed that the function of these words is basically verbal. Assimilation to verbs, however, has been found unacceptable by others, principally on the ground that, with the exception of *vidat'* and *slychat'* in their predicative use, the «predicatives», by historical and morphological criteria, are either nouns (as *grech, žal', len', ochota, pora*), expressions of adverbial type (as *vprave, v sostojanii, v silach, bez pamjati, ne proč'*) or - the vast majority - words terminating in *-o* identifiable either with adverbs or with the short form of the nominative singular neuter of adjectives. The contrast between the morphological heterogeneity and the seemingly uniform syntactical function of these forms finally led L. V. Ščerba [2] to postulate a new part of speech, known henceforward as «category of state» (*kategorija sostojanija*). This name is based on the fact that the largest group of predicatives expresses either physical or psychological states of human or other animate beings (*mne*, etc., *cholodno; veselo, skučno*) or states of nature and the surrounding environment or relations of space and time (*vdol' reki tumanno; na ulice ticho; do goroda nedaleko; uže pozdno*). It also serves to emphasize the observation that impersonal predicative sentences are especially closely connected with the verb *byt'* expressing state (or with *stat', sdelat'sja* expressing change

[1] for example, A. Ch. Vostokov and A. A. Šachmatov.
[2] in *O častjach reči v russkom jazyke* in «Russkaja reč'» II (1928).

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of state) in contradistinction to sentences the predicate of which is formed by verbs expressing action.

An influential school of thought among grammarians, particularly in the Soviet Union, favours recognition of the « category of state » as a new part of speech, the protagonists, since Ščerba's death, being V. V. Vinogradov [1] and E. M. Galkina-Fedoruk [2]. Their arguments remain the subject of controversy, however, and Fr. Travniček [3] in particular has argued persuasively that the syntax of impersonal predicatives is not sufficiently distinct from that of personal non-verbal sentences in which the predicate is formed either by an adjective (as *on zdorov*) or by a noun (as *Puškin - velikij russkij pisatel'*) to warrant the introduction of a special grammatical category.

A less radical approach, which has gained ground in grammars and other works on the Russian language [4] and is implicit in the practice of a number of dictionaries [5], is that which describes predicatives as « predicative adverbs ». These are defined by the *Grammar of the Russian Language* of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. (which appears, however, to acknowledge « category of state » as an alternative appellation) as « adverbs having tense forms and serving to express predicates in impersonal sentences » [6]. The category is said to comprise words with termination *-o* which are correlative (*sootnositel'nye*) to the nominative singular neuter of the short form of adjectives (excepting the modal predicatives *dolžno, možno, nado*) and « a few words which have passed into the category of predicative adverbs out of the class of nouns and which coincide in form

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[1] *Russkij jazyk* (Mosca-Leningrado 1947) pp. 399-421.

[2] in (i) *Voprosy sintaksisa sovremennogo russkogo jazyka* ed. V. V. Vinogradov (Mosca 1950) pp. 302-320 (ii) *Sovremennyj russkij jazyk - Morfologija* ed. V. V. Vinogradov (Mosca 1952) pp. 394-404.

[3] *Zametki o « kategorii sostojanija »* in « Voprosy jazykoznanija », 3 (1956), pp. 46-53.

[4] including those of some non-Russian scholars (for example, F. M. Borras and R. F. Christian, *Russian Syntax* [Oxford 1959], p. 177). A. Mazon, *Grammaire de la langue russe* (Paris 1945), records the usage of impersonal predicatives but does not theorize about their grammatical status. B. O. Unbegaun, *Russian Grammar* (Oxford 1957), treats them as adverbs under the rubric « Non-verbal predicate ».

[5] including the two most authoritative Soviet dictionaries: (i) *Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo jazyka* (Mosca-Leningrado 1950- ; (ii) *Slovar' russkogo jazyka* vols. I-IV (Mosca 1957-1961).

[6] *Grammatika russkogo jazyka*, vol. I (Mosca 1952), p. 632.

with the corresponding nouns in the nominative case ». These words (*žal'*, etc.) have clearly been wrenched fatally out of their original grammatical category. But the morphological ambiguity of words ending *-o* remains. The latter are the subject of the present brief study, the aim of which is to show that the arguments used to support identification of these words in all cases with adverbs are inconclusive and that the label « predicative adverbs », if applied to all predicative words, is, in consequence, ill-chosen. This note does not presume to offer a definitive solution of the problem of the status of predicative words as a whole, but it suggests, in conclusion, that their *function* is more akin to that of verbs than of any other historical part of speech and that the introduction of a special « category of state » may be superfluous.

II

« The history of the ' category of state ' », Vinogradov has written [1], « must be connected with the historical fate of the verb ' to be ' and with the history of the categories of the verb, the short form of the adjective and the adverb ». An interesting study, related to predicative words, of the devaluation of the verb ' to be ' in Indo-European languages to the role of copula has been made by A. V. Isačenko [2]. From this it emerges that the case for identifying predicatives with the corresponding adverb rests on the intuitive conception of the former as serving to modify the verb ' to be ' (the defectiveness of the present tense of Russian *byt'* is irrelevant in this context, since the predicatives regularly occur also in combination with *budet* and *bylo*). In practical terms it may be said that the sentences « *mne chorošo, durno, skučno* », etc. answer questions of the form « *Kak Vam?* », « *Kak Vy čuvstvuete sebja?* », etc. In support of identification of predicatives with adverbs it is possible to compare impersonal sentences in which the former express physical or psychological state with sentences in which a « verb of state » occurs with a

[1] op. cit., p. 402.
[2] *O « kategorii sostojanija » v slavjanskich jazykach* in « Voprosy jazykoznanija », 6 (1955).

personal subject and is modified by an adverb, as, for example, *nam neplocho* and *my živëm neplocho*. But an argument from analogy of this type requires that the copula-forms (*est'*), *budet, bylo* be considered capable of qualification by an adverb. This is plausible only in the case of those predicatives of the above group (as *bojazno, durno*) which have no meaning except in relation to a subject (*mne*, etc.); thus, for example, *mne bylo durno* may be said to be equivalent semantically to *ja čuvstvoval sebja durno*. But a much larger class of predicatives (as *želatel'no, interesno, polezno, trudno, jasno*) have an absolute usage (independent of a personal referent), in which no such substitution may be made and identification with the adverb-homonym appears to be excluded [1]. It is more natural to relate these words to the nominative singular neuter of the corresponding adjective. The propriety of so doing is supported by those cases (as *izvestno, svojstvenno*) [2] in which no corresponding adverb is found.

A further category of impersonal predicatives which it is impossible to assimilate to adverbs is that of such short forms of the nominative singular neuter of the past participle passive as *prinjato, (ne) veleno, zapreščeno*. The usage of the past participle passive, moreover, both impersonal and personal, without the copula provides a close and interesting parallel to the predicative usage, impersonal and personal, of the short forms of the adjective. It is significant that *nameren* and *objazan*, for example, are felt to have lost their participial status and to be comparable syntactically with the adjectival predicatives *rad* and *gorazd*.

The features advanced by Vinogradov and Galkina-Fedoruk as distinguishing words ending *-o* included in the « category of state » from short forms of the corresponding adjectives are (i) exclusively predicative usage (ii) absence of declension (iii) non-agreement with a subject (iv) possession of tense forms. The first criterion and, *a fortiori*, the second apply, however, only

[1] the semantic distinction between words of this class and those expressing physical or psychological state corresponds to the distinction in Galkina-Fedoruk's terminology between « impersonal-predicative words » and « words belonging to the category of state » proper. op. cit. (1950), pp. 303–4.

[2] there is also no adverb corresponding to the modal predicatives *možno, nužno, nadobno*.

to that handful of cases (as *ljubo*) in which in modern Russian no corresponding adjective is found. Commenting on the third criterion, Vinogradov asserts that in such sentences as *v pole bylo vetreno* and *segodnja očen' cholodno* the absence of agreement is incompatible with attribution of adjectival form to the words *vetreno* and *cholodno*. In this he appears arbitrarily to limit the scope of the adjective: this is clear from comparison of the Russian construction with similar idiom in languages in which the adverb and the neuter adjective forms are not homonymous (see below). The fourth criterion — possession of tense forms in combination with (*est'*), *budet* and *bylo* — also appears puzzlingly arbitrary. If we compare, for example, *nam* (*est'*), *budet, bylo grustno* and *zrelišče* (*est'*), *budet, bylo grustno* (*-nym*), it is not clear how impersonal predicatives differ significantly in this respect from personal predicative adjectives.

III

It has been noted that impersonal predicatives play an unusually large role in Russian. But they are not confined to Russian. Since this study is devoted primarily to elucidating the grammatical status of predicatives ending *-o*, it may be instructive briefly to compare the usage of two languages in which the nominative singular neuter of the adjective and the adverb respectively are normally (as they are not in Russian) morphologically distinct — Ancient Greek and Polish.

Greek is selected because, though the use of impersonal predicatives is much rarer than in Russian, the forms involved are without exception unambiguously identifiable with the nominative singular neuter of the corresponding adjective. We may note, for example, the use of ἀδύνατον (Herodotus, *History* 1.32); αἰσχρόν (Homer, *Iliad* 2.298); ἀναγκαῖον (Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1317); ἐχθρόν (Homer, *Odyssey* 12.452); καλόν (Sophocles, *Antigone* 72); χαλεπόν (Homer, *Odyssey* 4.651). Usage in the present indicative is usually but not invariably accompanied by the copula ἐστι [1].

[1] cf. the use of καλόν in the text cited above: καλόν μοι τοῦτο ποιούσῃ θανεῖν.

In Polish there is a small — by comparison with Russian — but interesting group of impersonal predicatives with the termination *-o* which similarly are accompanied usually but not invariably in the present tense by the copula *jest*. Among the most common of these are *gorąco, zimno; miło, przykro, smutno* [1], *wesoło; warto; wolno*. Following the general rules of modern Polish, it would seem necessary to identify these forms with the corresponding adverb and not with the nominative singular neuter of the adjective. An alternative explanation of some, if not all, of these cases, however, is that they may be residual examples of the old « uncompounded » variant of the adjective — corresponding to the short forms in Russian — which survives in a small group of personal predicative forms (*rad, wart, kontent; wesół, zdrów, winien, powinien, gotów, łaskaw, pełen, pewien*). The correspondence of *wesół-wesoło* and *wart-warto* in the two groups above will be noted. W. Doroszewski, moreover, commenting on those adjectives which retain the two forms of the nominative singular neuter (with the termination *-e* and -o respectively), indicates a distinction in their syntactical function which supports the thesis suggested above. He gives as illustration the variants *zdrowe* and *zdrowo* in the sentences *drzewo jest zdrowe* and *pływać jest zdrowo*: that is, the form in *-e* coincides with the personal, the form in *-o* with the impersonal predicative [2].

IV

Travniček, in the article referred to above, expresses the cautious view that « the properties of the words assigned to the ' category of state ' ... are ... not such as to enable one to speak of a special part of speech: these words remain nouns, adjectives and adverbs » [3]. It is hoped that the considerations set out above concerning predicatives in *-o* support the view, first, that the

[1] cf. also Czech *je mi smutno*.

[2] W. Doroszewski, *Podstawy gramatyki polskiej* (*część pierwsza*) (Varsovia 1952), p. 202. cf. also Z. Klemensiewicz, T. Lehr-Spławiński, S. Urbańczyk, *Gramatyka historyczna języka polskiego* (Varsovia 1955), pp. 323-326, who explain the derivation of the adverbial ending -o from the old form of the nominative singular neuter of the adjective.

[3] op. cit., p. 48.

majority of these words, despite their special semantic nuances, can be identified with existing parts of speech, and, second, that of these words not enough can be firmly identified with adverbs to warrant attaching the description « predicative adverbs » to the entire class. If an overall name for the category be required, it is suggested that « predicative words » or Isačenko's « predicatives » is more satisfactory. If we consider function rather than morphology or history, the traditional view that predicatives are closely akin to verbal forms appears correct. In many cases an impersonal non-verbal predicative may be replaced by an impersonal verb (as *emu stalo grustno - emu vzgrustnulos'; temno - temneet*) [1].

Similarly, Russian usage sometimes differs interestingly in this respect from that of other languages (we may compare, for example, Russian *mne sovestno, mne stydno* with Latin *me paenitet, me pudet*). Finally, the claim that the introduction of a new part of speech is required in order to distinguish non-verbal predicates expressing *state* from verbal predicates expressing *action* [2] is an arbitrary one which not only circumscribes needlessly the verb as a grammatical category [3] but is at variance with the empirical fact that many Russian verbs are « verbs of state ».

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[1] cf. also the colloquial predicative expressions *ja*, etc. *bol'še tuda ne chodok* (*ezdok*), which, though not impersonal, equally illustrate this point.
[2] see Galkina-Fedoruk, op. cit. (1950), p. 303.
[3] cf., for example, the definition of 'verb' in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as « that part of speech which is used to express action or *being* » [my italics - M. W.]